Philosophy of Authority

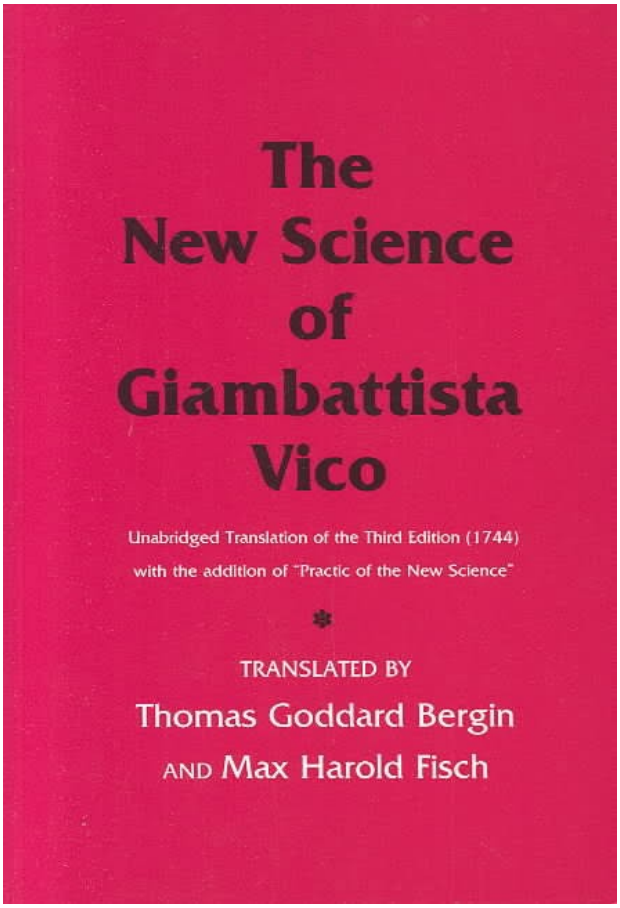
By Friedrich Hansen

The irritating fact about modernity is that romanticism with its medieval nostalgia won't die. The West for all its cyber intelligence and digital empowerment seems incapabale to let the medieval world go. Instead romanticism still rules over the Western mind. Its extended culture of fantasy and virtual productions cannot but rely for inspiration on the medieval guilt culture. It is worth remembering that European romanticism succeeded Christian Hellenism after the French Revoltion and this link is alive as it rebounds in the recent wave of "me toos" and calls for an end of the sexual revolution. It was Thomas Mann who reduced romanticism in his second last novel of 1955 to a narrative of the "Holy Sinner" dealing with the self-addicted individual. The romantics were keen to hide this under the metaphor of the innocent plant which is firmly rooted in the ground - rather than in religious transcendence - from below searching for identity in the open space of the universe. It is important to realize that while the human imagination can cope with temporal limitlessness, as with monotheism, the notion of unlimited space is an entirely different matter. For most of us it is truly mindboggling and may even induce vertigo, which might be behind recent calls for "safe spaces". Yet vertigo used to be the romantic "kick". Surely it was the consequence of the descent of the Enlightenment from the paradigm of the auditive to the visual experience. Unless we reverse this course and embrace religion again as it is right know happening beyond the Western hemisphere, we won't get rid of romanticism and the Western individual won't get back its self control.

Meanwhile the concept of the „The Holy Sinner" runs through most of modern romantic fantasy such as Tolkien's fictional output (http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/out-of-the-shire-life-beyond-tolkien/). Tolkien's narratives depend on a purely emotionally driven lowering of intellectual experience toward „being part of life", indulging in „the feel of it", which celebrates evil for the sheer fun if it – perpetuing the good old Faustian experience of the Renaissance. Aesthetically speaking this is about "confounding life with art", first promoted by Oscar Wilde. It thrives on the anti-authoritarian drive of autonomes invention of ones own self, yet it is cought in Greek metaphysics of the visual paradigm and repetitive mere self-mirroring.

Now let me ask a question: what sets apart the two main cultural trains that informed Western civilization? It is regarding the category of authority and Law. Giambattista deconstructed the Western myth, pretending that Rome got its laws from Athens. He discloses that the Greeks had several words for sex but none for authority, which became the central term of Roman law. The

Hebrews by contrast invented transcendent authority but had no word for sex. For this reason it is far more likely that Roman authority hailed from Jerusalem and its concept of “hidden power” which remains a spectacular feature of the vertical Jewish guilt culture. With their hundreds of city states the Greeks of antiquity were stuck in horizontal shame -honor-and-revenge culture. Hellenic polytheism remains the template for our postmodern, relativistic world. Romans could overcome the shame culture inherited from Athens only thanks to the influence of Jerusalem and Christianity. With his discovery of the genealogy of authority, long ignored in Western epistomology, Vico invalidates in advance Sigmund Freud's anti-authoritarian Greek Oedipus-complex as the blueprint for Western society. The same applies to his disciple Theodore W. Adorno – he, who would construct the authoritarian character of the “white male” in his *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* as the linchpin of Nazism. Vico's observation definitely calls into question Freud's and Adorno’s notion of a hard-wired Western authority, suggesting inescapable, eternal conflict between father and son as the nemesis of the West. By far more important was infanticide in ancient Greece and beyond. In particular the killing of sons, a leftover of the old matriarchat, was widespread in the ancient Middle East with the exception of Israel. But infanticide still peaked in the Roman Empire and was even legalized during the Roman Republic as a fatherly prerogative. In this light Freud's psychoanalysis would be the unwitting attempt to heal modern neurotics through a regression form Christian guilt towards Greek shame culture.


The New Science of Giambattista Vico
Unabridged Translation of the Third Edition (1744)
with the addition of "Practic of the New Science"
TRANSLATED BY
Thomas Goddard Bergin
AND Max Harold Fisch

Which brings to mind the notion of anachronism, invented by Vico for the purpose of attributing identities to certain historical epochs. By he was creating the notion of particular cultures or ethnocentrism. He was also the first to come up with the concept of historical cycles of organic rise and fall in history.[1] The Western reception of Vico outside of Italy began only in the 20th century when he became widely read in the English speaking world by that closing up to the ranks of Dante and Machiavelli. Vico's *New Science* positioned itself as particularistic against the trendy universalists as Grothe and Pufendorf and influenced the English Hebraist John Seldon. It was for this reason that Isaiah Berlin would hail Vico next to Herder as the mentor of European pluralism and tolerance.[2] Vico introduced a new critical method based on "empathy", employing “imaginative intelligibility” toward primitive theological poetics as it expressed itself in ancient languages. By that he aimed at understanding the emergence of the first human institutions such as family and marriage, which initially were believed to come from the gods. Vico’s design of his new epistemology is fascinating with his simple focus on “human choice” in order to be able to reconstruct tradition, customs or simply ways of doing things. Here is how he describes his “epistemology” - a method of garnering knowledge of the past: "Philosophy undertakes to examine philology (that is, the doctrine of all the institutions that depend on human choice; for example, all

***Noah damning Ham*, 19th-century painting by Ivan Stepanovitch Ksenofontov**

1 G. Vico: “Autobiography”, introduced and translated by Harold Fish, p.?

2 Isaiah Berlin: “Three Critics of the Enlightenment”, p.?.

histories of the languages, customs, and deeds of peoples in war and peace), of which, because of the deplorable obscurity of causes and almost infinite variety of effects, philosophy has had almost a horror of treating; and reduces it to a form of a science by discovering it in the design of an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the historians of all nations; so that, on account of this its second principal aspect, our Science may be considered a *philosophy of authority.* For by virtue of new principles of mythology herein disclosed as consequences of the new principles of poetry found herein, it is shown that the fables were true and trustworthy histories of the customs of the most ancient peoples of Greece." Vico as historian took the modest route of describing the ancients as they understood themselves rather than imposing “critical rationalizations” on them.[3] Like with later writers such as Philip Rieff or Joseph B. Soloveitchick, Giambattista Vico's is a philosophy of authority in the affirmative as opposed to the notorious „emancipatory-critical“ variety of the Freuds, Lacans and Adornos of this world. Greek “double symbolism” - shared by the Hebrews of the “old testament” when both were still mired in shame cultures - shows us how the same word denotes the “name” in general as in HaShem (“the name”, neutral for God) as well as in a particular meaning, where it denotes the blessed progenitor of all Israel: Shem, the son of Noah. He is distinguished from Ham, the progenitor of the cursed Canaanites. A modern example for this would be the extremely successful “particular” brand “Tempo” which also denotes handkerchief as generic term. Not only Ham but all his offspring, all Canaanites, was cursed by Noah after Ham had disregarded his father's authority. Upon discovering him naked and drunken, Ham failed to cover him gracefully and protect his dignity. This alone rendered him unredeemed. All men in monotheism are endowed with the name of the family and ought to protect it. HaShem, the God of Shem is being implemented by Noah, the man chosen by the divine being for his second attempt to populate the earth with his chosen people by implementing a sense of authority. On this depends the turn in Judaism from universals towards particulars. It avoids abstractions for its own sake, Kantian “things in themselves” meaning non-embedded (liberal) universals. Rather Judaism embraces ascending universals, sustained by particulars, under the assumption of the human primacy of life and love, united in transcendental authority. It is this divine authority which alone holds together particulars and universals. By contrast profane power relations depend on the separation of universals from particulars in order to gain leverage through free-wheeling abstracts. This represented the historical dynamics in the “Dialectics of the Enlightenment” which was hell bent on getting rid of authority and as a result plunged into totalitarianism. This remains the fate of the Hellenized West and its liberal Messianism, ever so often exuding global hybris.

3 G. Vico: “New Science”, Naples 1744 "Idea of the Work", p. 6.

Another example from the gentile world, related by Vico, is Jove, endowed with divine commands, whose Latin name *Ious* became the old word *ious* for law, later contracted to *ius* – "so that justice among all peoples is naturally taught along with piety".[4] Vico would emphasize the benefits of particularism - married family men, prudent in self-sacrifice while domesticated by the institution of matrimony were always strong - telling us: "For divine providence ordered human institutions with this eternal counsel: that families should first be founded by means of religions, and that upon the families commonwealths should then arise by means of laws." The name humanity, Vico suggests, is going back to the ancient institution of burial with *humando* meaning burying. Since the burial rite is the third oldest institution, its etymology also helps understand the attractiveness of the Western death culture which is driven by the seemingly inexhaustible modern longing for crime stories. Revealingly they almost always depart from a human corpse in order to unravel the narrative in reverse order. The oldest rite, sacrifice, is the foundation of community while the second oldest institution, Vico explains, is the family, going back to the name *famuli* which denotes nomadic young men. Originally they sought asylum in pious families and took on a status similar to prisoners of war, servants or slaves in a host society. Divine providence is meant to preserve the human commonwealth and ordains that "those who use their minds should command and those who use their bodies should obey."[5] The slaves initially were not entitled to have solemn nuptials which the Latins called *conubium*, lawful marriage. Vico adds "native etymologies are histories of institutions signified by the natural order of ideas. First the woods, then cultivated fields and huts, next little houses and villages..." etc.

FIRE VERSUS SEA

Which brings us to the role of Jerusalem and Athens as opposites analogue almost to the opposition of fire and water. What fire is for religious man the sea is for the pagan. In Judaism most prominently the flames of the Hanukkah menora are being lit every year in memory of the rekindling of the eternal ligths of the Temple in Jerusalem on occasion of the decisive victory over the Greeks. All the same the Passover story unfolds along the miraculous burning bush, which is not consumed by fire for being touched by the divine. In Hebrew Scripture HaSchem leads Israel by signs of clouds during the day and fire by night. According to the Talmud the Torah is described as "black fire written upon white fire" capable of shaping "the paths that men take."[6] Joseph B. Soloveitchick explains early on in „Halakhic Man" that religious man is anything but cool and simple. This is contrary to the belief in religious harmony by reformers, Protestant or Jews alike, that „the religious experience is of a very simple nature – that is, devoid of the spiritual tortuousness

4 G. Vico, "New Science", p. 10-14.
5 Ibid, p. 13.
6 http://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/2016/12/the-jewish-tradition-unfolds-in-flames-heres-why/

present in the secular cultural consciousness, of psychic upheavels, and of pangs and torments that are inextricable connected with the development and refinement of man‘s spiritual personality.“[7] No one dismantled this myth more thoroughly than Joseph Soloveitchick suggesting that the cliche of the calm religious mind is false and often just a projection, revealing the longing for effortless peace of mind in the liberal mind. This brings me to the German pantheism dispute of the 1780s which sprang up between Gottfried E. Lessing and Friedrich H. Jacoby when they met in the noble library at Wolfenbüttel. Bent down over Goethe‘s new poem “Prometheus”, on the half god stealing fire from the Caucaus, they began disputing specifically the role of fire in it, as Goethe tells us in his autobiography.[8]

It turns out that the liberal faible for “coolness” reaches back not only to enlightened Spinoza or the Renaissance of Lucretius but to ancient Greece, namely Epicurus who lived in the third century BCE. It was Leo Strauss, the American political philosopher, a refugee from Nazi Germany, who concerned himself at length with Epicurus because he took him to be the only consistent critique of religion in antiquity. Yet Epicurus is better known as the namesake for unadulterated pleasure and for being the poster child of the Hellenic Renaissance. Less known is that to his credit Epicurus spent most of his life on the notion of liberating man from fear. Which brings us back to the symbolic divide over fire and water between Jerusalem and Athens with the notable exception of the postclassical stoics, known for the symbolism of fire. But only in mature Judaism ashes became the paradigm of separations: man is made from and eventually pulverized into ashes. “Dust, to the Hebrews, corresponds with the Greek idea of the many, the divers, the indeterminate. Dust is the very figure of death, of final outcome of decay, an object of disgust and abomination. A sacrament of mourning, one might say: in days of disaster the Jews would throw dust on their head as an affliction (Jos. 7:6, Neh 9:1, Job 16).”[9]

The fact that only fire can dismantle hybrids by separating the elements into their pure components is often hinted at in the Bible, most famously in Bereshit. London’s former Chief Rabbi Hertz comments at the smoking furnace which appears in Abrahams dream featuring the first Jewish covenant with God: „The symbol of the Godhead was seen to pass between the pieces, to ratify the covenant which was being made.“[10] As we have discussed already “bereshit” means „beginning“ but also „split in half“ with fire running right through as the typical way the Torah conceives of creation out of nothing, i.e. through separation (Genesis 15:9-12). When Abraham was demanding

7 Joseph B. Soloveitchick: „Halakhic Man“, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia 1983, p. 140.
8 Georg Essen/ Christian Danz: “Philosophisch-Theologische Streitsachen -Pantheismusstreit”, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt, 2012, p.100.
9 Claude Tresmontant: “Hebrew Thought” p. 6.
10 Personal communication with my Orthodox Rabbi; Genesis 15:17, Pentateuch, Hertz edition op.cit. p.55.

proof of God's promise of "land and offspring", he asked his maker: „whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?", the answer is providential, harsh and hazy: „Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years… and afterwards they come out with great substance".

The motive of sharing land and ownership of land after having suffered slavery represents the core tenets of Judaism: self-help and life-long learning, ascendency through the experience of suffering as the way for acquiring strength, slavery as the test before rewards and finally an emphasis on "sanctification of life" . For the "Promises Land" is conditioned on pious conduct by the Israelites. This has often been misread by Christians on their acquisitive terms as the "Holy Land" betraying the apologetics of the crusades. Holyness has to be constantly earned and is not a free gift of the land. While Athens was a society of slave holders, Jerusalem never forget the bitter taste of bondage, which is remembered every year on Pessach. Importantly the Israeli escape into liberty is for ever been remembered as God's seperating the natural elements, the waters of the Red Sea, allowing his people a safe passage towards Sinai. With this great divide serving as a good omen separation would subsequently be sanctified as the most holy principle. As such it is opposed to all media for blending of materials, which is precisely what Jewish sensibilities abhor. The Torah strictly forbids any mix under the rules of kosher and non-kosher stuff as a principle, in particular male vs female clothing, wool and linen, meat and milk etc. To this Athens could not have chosen a more contrasting symbol than the sea, representing the mother of blending. The sea ideally harmonizes all things, apt as it is to devour anything deep down. Not for nothing does in Hippocratic medicine the specific mix of the four body fluids make up the Greek charakter. This explains why Hellenism produced only idealized types, but not individual personalities. The Greeks naturally had to rely on the protective power of the sea surrounding their islands. In subjective terms we are looking at the typical Narcissus, fascinated by his own mirror image on the surface of water. This prompts the Greek to favor appearance all the more for not revealing much of himself.

Now the author of this philosophy of ideal mix, of fluidity and relativism is of course Epicurus. Epicureans like Sophists submerged themselves into subjectivity, claiming that injustice is evil only insofar as it irritates ones tranquil mind.[11] Ever since Plato there had been little progress in political thinking and this demand made itself felt for something to hold on, for spiritual stabilization, a mental carapace of "coolness" as it were. This was the purpose of Epicurus' philosophy, the *Kyria doxa*. At the time of mature Hellenism the city state or *polis* was almost dead which prompted Epicurus to turn his attention toward the mere quantitaive individual. Hence his paradoxical meme

11 H. Usener, Epicurea, Leipzig 1887; Felix Müller: "Die Philosophie der Epikureer", available on the Web.

“Nothing is enough for the man for whom little is enough” - a plain rejection of moderation or wise “postponement of pleasure”. Instead the Greeks were torn between *Ananke* (necessity) and *Tyche* (contingency), two trans-personal poles of existence that would inform overlapping group typologies.

Epicurus sticks to Solon’s logic of the *natural equipoise* of the just state of things and finds it in the analogy of the “calm sea”. Reducing the community of the *polis* to the individual he takes *Ananke* as the necessary „resignation to the evil of marriage”, necessary to be sure only as a means to achieve peace of mind, in Greek *Ataraxia*. Thus for Epicurus the highest good is the deepest calm conceived by him as freedom from turmoil, all wrapped in his analogy of the sea. But it has to be added that this naturalist analogy of emotional stir or calm lends itself to wallowing in one's emotions and cutting off reason or reflection. It will be picked up again in the Renaissance and becomes the arbiter of faith in the Reformation by Luther.

This Epicurean attitude is a typical case of “externalization”, in Freudian terms: “projection of inner conflict onto the outer world”, the sea being the perfect image of levelling shame culture which also informed the *Ilias* and the irate Achilles. In this sense Epicurus is loath of any hierarchy or “vertical of authority” as required for guilt culture. This explains his attractiveness for the Renaissance but also for the Nazis with their rather flat and polycentric power structure. All the same Epicurus, answering Democritus, intends to “humble” the latter’s harsh vertical precepts meant “to make his moral teachings memorable”. He internalizes the latters teachings, adopting them for the Athenian household as it were, in the pursuit of which Epicurus dedicated himself expressively to the image of calm waters and the safe harbour as representing “peace of mind”. Which is why he is worried about sudden incursions into the consciousness by external events. This is in line with modern shock theory telling us that the eye as the first line of defense absorbs visual incursions or sensations and literally freezes them into shock images: ”sudden events that terrify the ignorant, known as *simulacra*” or frozen images. In order to achieve „coolness of mind”, those images would subsequently be liquefied into more flexible chains of words; interestingly it was Epicurus who observed first that the frozen image quickly “flows out again”, meaning out of consciousness, according to Solon's archaic “physiology”. For it is being “submerged into the sea”, reminding us of Freud’s displacement into the unconscious. This points to the habitual riddance typical of shame culture, a culture lacking the sublime, a proper sense of history and an inner moral self as well.

In Greece more often than not *simulacra* carry mute, guilt feelings or unwelcome reminders of displaced slavery. This can be gathered from Epicurus anxiety of the “stir of consciousness”, i.e.

conscience, which nevertheless point to his intact sensibility toward injustice. Yet despite being the prime cause of Epicurus' "turmoil of the soul" or panic feeling, his sense of injustice goes only sofar as not to disturb his perfect sense of "cool". This echoes the very limited sense of fellow-feeling in Greek shame culture with the sea as the perfect cover for civic indifference. The long history of the liberal-western ethical atitude of "cool" goes back to Epicurus' retreat into the private realm. It also marks his swerve of public responsibility typically reflecting the "retreat of public imagination" in the late Greek *polis.* Despite being widely ignored by classical studies even today, slavery was always lurking under the surface of the Greek civilization and had to be rationalized or desplaced to the underworld.

Therefore the sea advanced as the Greek visible paradigm of "vanishing" or conflict resolution through forgetfulness. The sea was to become the sentimental Western symbol of forgone memories in poems and songs alike with the sailor as its messanger. Accordingly the notion of transcendence in Greek metaphysics is merely spatial, settling western man with unsavory longings for remote places and far away destinies. Judaism by contrast, denounced as the "eternal wandering Jew", is selfcontaining because his idea of transcendence is temporal. While space is always narrow and static it does not suffer lightly any contraditions because it is not apt to change. It is rather time that can heal wounds and resolve contradictions. It is for this reason that the Greek basic mechanism of coping with reality has to do with "shock absorption". That is the default mode of image processing by "kiling" them through forgetfulness in the paradigmatic visual culture of Athens. It is from Greece that the image as *"nature morte" or still life* emerged. It betrayed the worship of nature as death cult *avant la lettre.*

It is for this very reason that political upheavals of the Greek *polis* were interpreted in naturalistic fashion as "a stirring of the sea by winds" which in turn are calmed down by natural entropy of the sea. Solon in his *Paidiea* famously conceptualized the city as synonymous to the sea. This blatant lack of a sense of history would later strike Plutarch as archaic. Certainly the archaic trope of the sea conceived of the ideal of justice as "placid disposition" of the *demos* rendered as "the quietest of things" (akaiotate), anticipating today's notion of the silent majority. It is the perfect formula of eclipsing the inner voice of conscience under the centrifugal gaze, which is what has been emulated as "oceanic feeling" in Freud's psychoanalytic parlance. God's voice is being submerged if not literally drowned. Polybius, Livy and Cicero would later all cite the calm sea as a trope for things political. This gives us an idea of the enormity of Greco-Roman displacement under "split reality" which made it perfect for Freud's ill advised choice of the Hellenic mythology as palimpsest for the modern urban neurotic. All the same the Athenian denial of slavery has been so powerful that even

two millennia later the American founding fathers, flabbergasted by the Hellenic spirits, took a blind eye on negro slavery when they drafted their constitution.

The healing message of the Epicurean for well over two millennia remained the maxim: “Stay away from political life”, cultivate a “detached cool”. The same was very fashionable in Roman times with such luminaries as Seneca, Epictetus and Marc Aurel or even later in medieval Germany, to name just cool Meister Eckehart, whose utmost goal has been serenity. The stoic philosopher Seneca (4 BC–AD 65) in one of his letters wrapped up Epicurean philosophy thus: “the greatest empire is to be emperor of oneself”. The preference of private over public life, i.e. utmost retreat into the self in order to keep a cool countenance. However in this context necessarily the common good gets short shrift.[12] It was Epicurus and his School of thought that transferred the issue of immortality of the soul from the family where it exclusively belongs, onto mere friends and the *stao* or public wall. It thus morphed into a personal testament and sort of materialization of the ego under the notion of transmigration of the soul, in Greek called metempsychosis or palingenesis. This was destined to become a fad of European atheist and Hellenized writers such as Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Kurt Gödel and James Joyce. For the German and Western academe „transmigration of the soul” took on notoriety through discipleship, burdened with various forms of nasty rivalry, at times with wine-saturated nocturnal sessions and mystic confraternity. Yet nothing else was to be expected from this sort of transmigration other than plain and boring reification: outpourings of romantic incontinence or “overflow of emotions”, as Coleridge put it once. This was to reshape the great medieval rival of the family, the monk, as the notorious modern artist both lowering and corrupting the vertical in authority as it had been established by monotheism.

After all Epicureanism would become a way of life. St Paul took form Epicurus the habit of writing letters to groups, addressing not individual interlocutors but rather stereo-types for creating followers, just like today's Facebook. The 19th century church historian Adolf von Harnack maintained that in antiquity such group letters were very important for the spread of Christianity. Facebook and Twitter somehow emulate the disintegration of public discourse in Greek antiquity because they turn most communication into Epicurean chat. This is suggested by digital jargon for emotional stir such as „shit storm“ which even remains well within the Epicurean watery analogy. Just like modern celebrities aping Jesus Christ, Epicurus has been immortalized as a healer, saviour and herald. Yet more than anything he also stands out as the “liberator” from family ties. As a great champion of friendship his influence remained powerful well into the 4th century C.E. and beyond.

12 http://www.theamericanconservaive.com/articles/a-tstoics-empire